

## Description

# METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CHANGING THE APPEARANCE OF A PRODUCT DISPLAY UNIT

### CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Design Patent Application Serial No. 29/181,256 filed May 7, 2003.

### BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates generally to product merchandising display units and, more particularly, to a method and apparatus for transforming the appearance of at least one side of a conventional product merchandising display unit such as a display cooler for merchandising soft drink products into a wide variety of different appearances so as to attract consumer attention and promote sales.

[0003] Numerous product merchandising display units and other point-of-purchase devices have been designed and man-

ufactured for use in merchandising a wide variety of different types of products including bottled products such as soft drink products to consumers. These display devices are commonly employed in supermarkets, convenience stores, grocery outlets, drug stores, liquor stores, fast food outlets and a wide variety of other wholesale and retail stores for use in store display windows, end-of-aisle merchandising areas, lobby and checkout areas, and other high traffic areas to show and focus attention on the products and wares displayed therein. It is not only the strategic location of a particular display merchandiser which is important, but it is often the ability of such product merchandiser to catch the eye of a prospective consumer which ultimately leads to a sale. This is true because the sale of many products occurs impulsively and opportunistically if consumers are directed, for whatever reason, to a particular merchandising display. Consumers are heavily influenced by product displays and a large percentage of brand name decisions are made in the store.

[0004] As a result, merchants and vendors are always attempting to enhance the appearance of conventional display merchandisers. See for example, U.S. Patent No. 6,363,640

owned by the present assignee. Such enhancements often times include elaborate header boards, product graphics, and other signage specifically designed to attract and focus consumer attention on the particular merchandising unit. It is therefore desirable to have a transformation method available to merchants and vendors for easily converting a conventional, ordinary looking display unit into an eye catching point-of-sale merchandiser which will more readily attract prospective shoppers and buyers to the display unit and to the particular products displayed therein.

[0005] Accordingly, the present invention is directed to overcoming one or more of the problems typically encountered in attempting to enhance the overall appearance of a particular product merchandising display unit.

#### **SUMMARY OF INVENTION**

[0006] The present invention teaches a transformation technique for changing the appearance of a product merchandising display unit wherein a panel member that is shaped and configured to conform to a particular product identity or any other envisioned representation is attachable to at least one side of the display unit in a particular manner such that, when the present panel member is attached to

the unit, the original look and appearance of the display unit is transformed into a new look and appearance, preferably a three-dimensional look, compatible with the representation desired or with the particular product or products being merchandised from the display unit. In this regard, the present panel member can take on any three-dimensional representation such that when attached to at least one side of the display unit, the present panel member will inconspicuously blend into and mate with the display unit so as to present a totally new and different look and shape as opposed to the look and shape of the previously existing display unit.

[0007] In one embodiment of the present invention, this transformation is accomplished through the interaction of the panel member of the present invention and an existing product merchandising display cooler adapted to hold and display chilled products. The existing cooler unit includes a body container, a chilling tub, and a floor member. The chilling tub is shaped and sized so as to fit within the body container and, in a preferred embodiment, includes a projecting and downturned rim terminating the top edge of the side wall associated therewith. The projecting downturned rim forms a channel member that fits over

the top edge portion of the body container in such a manner that the entire chilling tub is supported by such top edge. The floor member includes a channel member or groove that extends around the periphery thereof which functions to receive the side walls of the body container. The present panel member has an extending flange or lip associated with both the top and bottom portions thereof, these panel flanges being cooperatively engageable with the respective channel means associated with the top and bottom portions of the display cooler for holding and supporting the panel member in its operative position on the display cooler. In addition, the present panel member can be shaped and/or sized so as to achieve a new look and appearance regardless of the particular shape of the existing display unit. For example, the display unit may be rectangular, square, triangular or cylindrical in shape and the present panel member can be formed to mate therewith.

[0008] The present invention is adaptable for use with a wide variety of merchandising units of different sizes and shapes, including square, rectangular, cylindrical and other shapes. Any plurality of different mounting means may be used to secure the panel member to the existing product

merchandising unit including rivets, screws, and adhesives.

[0009] It is therefore a principal object of the present invention to provide a system for changing the appearance of a display unit.

[0010] Another object of the present invention is to provide a panel member having a shape and configuration different from that of at least one side of an existing display unit which is attachable to an existing display unit to present a new and different appearance of the unit to a consumer.

[0011] Another object of the present invention is to teach a transformation technique adaptable for use in conjunction with a wide variety of different display units wherein the overall appearance of a display unit is transformed into a more eye catching display unit.

[0012] These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art after considering the following detailed specification of the present method and apparatus in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS**

[0013] For a better understanding of the present invention, reference may be made to the accompanying drawings.

- [0014] Fig. 1 is a perspective view illustrating a typical product merchandising display unit.
- [0015] Fig. 2 is an exploded perspective view of the existing display unit of Fig. 1 along with one embodiment of the present panel member attachable thereto.
- [0016] Fig. 3 is a perspective view of a typical chilling tub associated with the existing display unit of Fig. 1.
- [0017] Fig. 4A is a perspective view of a typical floor member associated with the existing display unit of Fig. 1.
- [0018] Fig. 4B is a top plan view of the floor member of Fig. 4A.
- [0019] Fig. 5 is a perspective view illustrating one embodiment of the present invention attachable to the existing display unit of Fig. 1.
- [0020] Fig. 6 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 6-6 of Fig. 5.

#### **DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

- [0021] For purposes of illustration, although the present invention is illustrated and disclosed in association with a typical product merchandising display cooler such as the display cooler 12 illustrated in Figs. 1, 4A and 4B, it is recognized and anticipated that the present invention can be used in association with a wide variety of different types

of display units including a wide variety of differently sized and shaped display units such as display units having a rectangular, square, triangular and cylindrical configuration. Still further, for purposes of illustration, the present invention as illustrated in Figs. 2, 5 and 6 has been shown as including a panel member 10 that is shaped and configured to represent a wave-like form that is attachable to an existing product display unit 12 as best shown in Fig. 1. Although the panel member 10 is shaped and configured to represent a wave-like form, it is also recognized and anticipated that the panel member 10 can be shaped and configured so as to represent any particular shape or form and to correspond to any product identity or other representation. In this regard, although the present invention will be described based upon the specific representations illustrated in Figs. 2–6, it is recognized and anticipated that any other envisioned shape or configuration of the panel member 10 can be utilized based upon the teachings of the present invention.

[0022] Referring to the drawings more particularly by reference numbers wherein like numerals refer to like parts, number 12 in Fig. 1 identifies one embodiment of a typical product display unit commonly used in a wide variety of dis-



play applications. The display unit 12 represents a typical product merchandising display cooler designed to hold and display chilled products to consumers such as bottled and canned soft drinks and fruit juice products and the like. Referring to Figs. 2, 3, 4A and 4B, the display unit 12 includes a body container 14, a chilling tub 16, a floor member 18, and an optional lid or cover member 19. Although the display unit 12 is illustrated in Fig. 1 as being generally rectangular in overall shape, it is recognized that the present invention is equally adaptable for use with a multiplicity of differently shaped display units, for example, square, circular, triangular, hexagonal, or some other configuration, without impairing the teaching of the present invention.

[0023] Referring to Figs. 2, 3 and 6, the chilling tub 16 is typically a rectangular one-piece plastic construction having an upper side wall 20, a lower side wall 22, a bottom wall 24, a top rim portion 26, and a downturned rim edge portion 28. As best shown in Fig. 6, a substantially flat platform or intermediate floor member 30 is sized and dimensioned to rest upon and to be supported by the intermediate lip or shoulder surface 32 formed between the side walls 20 and 22. The platform 30 divides the chilling

tub 16 into an upper product holding portion 36 and a lower reservoir portion 34. The purpose of the platform 30 is to hold and support the various types of product and ice positioned within the product holding area 36. The platform 30 also has an opening (not shown) so as to allow the chilled waste water from the melting ice to drain into the reservoir portion 34.

[0024] The reservoir portion 34 is formed integral with the chilling tub 16 and is defined by the side wall 22, the bottom wall 24, and the platform 30. The reservoir portion 34 is provided with a drain hole 38 and a nipple 40 located in the bottom wall 24, which nipple 40 is adapted to accept the drain tube 42 for conducting the waste water to a suitable receiving means located exterior to the unit. In this regard, the body container 14 will include an appropriate opening 43 for allowing the drain tube 42 to extend therethrough.

[0025] As best shown in Fig. 6, the chilling tub 16 is shaped and dimensioned so as to fit within the body container 14 and is suspended therein from the top peripheral edge portion 44 thereof by the rim portions 26 and 28. It is important that the top peripheral edge 44 of the body container 14 engage the rim portions 26 and 28 so that the chilling tub

16 will be adequately supported when filled with both product and ice. The chilling tub rim portions 26 and 28 and the upper side wall 20 thereof form a channel 52 therebetween that notably receives the top peripheral edge 44 of body container 14 and, as described below, also receives the top lip or flange portion 48 associated with the present panel member 10.

[0026] The floor member 18 is best illustrated in Figs. 4A and 4B and is typically a rectangular one-piece construction that is substantially flat so as to conform to the bottom portion of body container 14. The floor member 18 should be made sufficiently sturdy so as to support the weight of the overall unit containing product and ice, and may include means such as in the form of apertures (not shown), or other means, for engaging a plurality of wheels or casters for easily moving the unit from one location to another. More particularly, as best illustrated in Fig. 4B, the floor member 18 includes a channel, slot, groove or other means 46 for receiving the bottom edge portion 47 of the body container 14 which extends substantially around the entire periphery of the floor member 18. The floor member 18 is shaped and dimensioned to substantially conform to the shape and dimensions of the body container

14, the bottom edge portion 47 being insertably receivable into the channel means 46.

[0027] The display unit 12 may also optionally include a lid or cover member 19 as best illustrated in Figs. 1, 2 and 6. The lid member 19 is preferably made of a clear plastic material to enhance the visibility of the products displayed within the unit 12. More particularly, the lid member 26 is sized and shaped so as to engage the top rim portion 26 of the chilling tub 16 as shown in Figs. 1 and 5. In this regard, the peripheral edge portion 58 can be configured for removable engagement with the top rim portion 26 such as via a friction fit engagement, or the peripheral edge portion 58 can be fixedly attached to the top rim portion 26 of the chilling tub 16 via conventional attachment means such as an adhesive attachment. The lid member 19 includes an opening 60 for providing easy access to the interior cavity of the chilling tub 16 and may include a substantially flat indented or recessed portion 62 for affixing or otherwise attaching pricing information or other advertising indicia associated with the products being held and displayed in the cooler unit 12. It is also recognized and anticipated that the lid member 19 can take on a wide variety of different shapes and configura-

tions including lid members having a hinged access door or panel associated therewith which can be easily lifted to an open position to provide access to the interior of the chilling tub 16. Other variations and modifications to the lid member 19 are likewise recognized and anticipated.

[0028] The present invention resides in the use of a panel member 10 as illustrated in Figs. 2, 5 and 6 which is attachable in overlaying fashion to one side of the existing display unit 12, such as the front portion thereof, so as to change the outward look and appearance of the overall unit. The panel member 10 is shaped and configured with a different shape and outward appearance as compared to at least one side of the existing product display unit 12 and, in the illustration set forth in Figs. 2, 5 and 6, the panel 10 is configured to represent a wave-like form. In this regard, it is recognized and anticipated that the shape and configuration of panel 10 can take on any representation or form so as to correspond, for example, to a particular attention-getting identity, a particular product, brand or company identity, or any other shape or form which is different from the shape or form of the already existing display unit such as display unit 12 illustrated in Fig. 1. When the present panel member 10 is attached to an existing

display unit such as the display unit 12 illustrated in Fig. 1, the original look and appearance of the display unit 12 is transformed into a new appearance as illustrated in Fig. 5.

[0029] As best illustrated in Fig. 2, a preferred embodiment of the panel member 10 includes respective top and bottom flanges 48 and 50, the flanges 48 and 50 being adapted to cooperatively engage channel means associated with the top and bottom portions of the display unit 12 as will be hereinafter explained. More particularly, as best illustrated in Fig. 6, the top flange 48 is sized and shaped so as to be insertably received into the channel means 52 adjacent of the front wall 55 of the body container 14. In this regard, the upper flange portion 48 of panel member 10 as well as rim portion 26 and downturned rim edge portion 28 are sized and dimensioned such that channel means 52 will cooperatively receive both the top edge portion 44 of the body container 14 and flange portion 48. In similar fashion, flange portion 50 of panel member 10 is likewise sized and shaped so as to cooperatively engage channel means 46 associated with floor member 18. Here again, the lower flange portion 50 of panel member 10 is sized and dimensioned so as to be cooperatively re-

ceived within channel means 46 along with the bottom edge portion 47 of the body container 14. The cooperative engagement of the top and bottom flange portions 48 and 50 of panel member 10 with the channel means 52 and 46 holds, supports and secures the panel member 10 in proper overlaying relationship to at least one side portion of body container 14.

[0030] In order to provide added stability to attachment of the panel member 10 to an existing display unit such as display unit 12, the panel member 10 may include side wing panel portions or side extending portions 54 which extend partially around the side portions of the body container 14 such as side portions 56 as best shown in Figs. 2 and 5. These side wing panel portions 54 will overlay a portion of side walls 56 of body container 14 and provide an additional attachment or joinder surface for further securing the panel member 10 to the body container 14. Although not required, use of the side panel portions 54 likewise help to prevent sideward or lateral movement of the panel member 10 relative to the existing display unit such as display unit 12. Still further, an adhesive or other attachment means may be applied to the flange portions 48 and 50 and the side panel portions 54 of panel mem-

ber 10 for permanently affixing the panel member 10 to the existing display unit such as display unit 12.

[0031] Although the means for attaching the panel member 10 to an existing product display unit has been described as being accomplished through the cooperative engagement of the panel flanges 48 and 50 and channel means 46 and 52, it is recognized and anticipated that a wide variety of other attachment means may be used to attach the panel member 10 to an existing display unit. For example, the panel member 10 could include only a top flange such as flange portion 48, only a bottom flange such as flange portion 50, only side panel portions 54, or panel member 10 could be attached through the use of screws, rivets, adhesives, or any other suitable means.

[0032] In addition, although the panel member 10 has been described as being a wave-like form, it is recognized and anticipated that the panel member 10 could take on any shape or configuration and still be within the scope of the present invention. It is also recognized that the panel member 10 can likewise be easily removed by disengaging the flanges 48 and 50 and panel portions 54 from channel means 46 and 52, and a new and completely differently shaped panel member 10 can be attached to the



same existing display unit to again change the outward appearance and presentation of such display unit. In this situation, the use of adhesive means or other appropriate attachment means will be selected and/or applied to various portions of the panel member 10 such that panel member 10 can be easily removed from an existing display unit and a new panel member 10 can be attached thereto. Use of the present panel member 10 can therefore create any representation or illusion appropriate for the particular merchandising application. The panel member 10 may include any graphics which will further enhance the representation or illusion when viewed at any angle relative to the overall display unit 12. In addition, it is also recognized and anticipated that the panel member 10 can be shaped and configured for attachment to any side portion of any existing display unit such as circular, square, hexagonal, or other side portion configuration, the panel member 10 being specifically sized and shaped so as to mate in overlaying fashion with the particular side portion of the existing display unit to be transformed. In this regard, it is also anticipated and recognized that the panel member 10 may be attached to other portions of an existing display unit such as display unit 12 without de-

parting from the spirit and scope of the present invention and without destroying the new appearance and/or three-dimensional illusion created by the attachment of panel member 10 to an existing display unit such as display unit 12.

[0033] Thus, there has been shown and described a novel method and apparatus for changing the appearance of an existing product display unit that fulfills all of the objects and advantages sought. Many changes, modifications, variations and other uses and applications of the present invention will, however, become apparent to those skilled in the art after considering this specification and the accompanying drawings. All such changes, modifications, variations and other uses and applications which do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention described herein are deemed to be covered by the invention which is limited only by the claims which follow.